COMMUNITY THEATRE REFERENCE MANUAL FOR DRAMA GROUPS
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This Community Theatre Reference Manual for Drama Groups was developed by Daniel Oluoch-Madiang’, in conjunction with Agnes A’Aballah, for the Zambia Integrated Systems Strengthening Program (ZISSP). In seeking utilize drama/theatre as a tool for social mobilization and dissemination of health messages in high impact campaigns ZISSP, under it’s Drama Capacity Building Strategy, is committed to building the capacity of community based drama groups to effectively and skillfully deliver health messages and engage target audiences in health promotion.

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All photos by Oluoch Madiang’
UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY THEATRE

In this manual, theatre is divided into two categories: conventional (stage) theatre and non-conventional (community) theatre.

**Conventional theatre (Stage theatre)** is the performance of a drama on a stage before a formal, mostly paying, audience in a theatre hall with actors wearing costumes, using props, and carefully following a script. This is the traditional sense of theatre.

The type of theatre performed at the Schools and Colleges Drama festivals, at the Lusaka Theatre Club, are examples of conventional theatre. In all these examples, organized theatre troupes perform a written drama for a paying audience.

**Non-conventional theatre (Community theatre)** does not have to be based on a written script or performed by trained actors in costumes on a formal set in a theatre hall. It does not have a clear division between the performers and the audience. Usually it is not performed for a paying audience because it is in an open space and any person can walk by, observe, and participate. **Community theatre** uses theatre to interact with the community. Working together, the actors and the audience use theatre to discuss or solve problems facing the community. It is used to educate and mobilize communities, and to discuss and question behaviors, attitudes, or knowledge to bring about social change.

In some forms of community theatre, the audience and the actors work together to compose and perform a drama, analyze a communal problem, and discuss acceptable solutions. Public health issues, democracy, spiritual growth, gender equality, and peace initiatives are some of the social concerns that have been explored using non-conventional theatre.

There are many variations and types of non-conventional theatre, designed based on their functions, manner of implementation, site of implementation or even the source from which it is derived. Examples of community theatre include:

- Guerrilla theatre
- Forum theatre or theatre of the oppressed
- Street theatre
- Agit-prop theatre (Agitation-Propaganda)
- Newspaper theatre
- Participatory Educational Theatre
- Theatre in Education
- Magnet Theatre
- Theatre in Development
- Ambush theatre

In this manual, we are more interested in understanding community theatre and the various elements that it involves including facilitation, audience participation, improvisation, post performance discussions etc.

The table below shows some of the differences between conventional and non-conventional theatre:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Conventional (Stage) Theatre</strong></th>
<th><strong>Non-Conventional (Community) Theatre</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normally takes place on a stage in a set building e.g. a theatre hall.</td>
<td>It takes place in spaces within the community e.g. social halls, playgrounds, parks, streets, marketplaces, verandas, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is generally based on a script written by a playwright.</td>
<td>It is a collaborative effort between the audience and actors and goes through stages, from problem identification to discussion of possible solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience participation is very limited; they only watch the play being performed by the actors.</td>
<td>The audience and actors freely change places and the audience is free to change the direction of the play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It uses a close-ended play that provides a resolution.</td>
<td>It uses an open-ended play that presents a dilemma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It mainly focuses on entertainment and appreciation of theatre as an art.</td>
<td>It focuses on education and change of behavior and attitudes, though employs entertainment too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is mostly commercial; the audience pays a fee to enter the performance hall.</td>
<td>It is free of charge and invites a defined target audience to participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The actors are only concerned with artistic skills.</td>
<td>The actors are concerned with a certain issue and increase their knowledge on the topic in addition to being concerned about their artistic skill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is no facilitator as the gap between the actors and audience is maintained throughout the performance.</td>
<td>There is a facilitator who acts as a bridge and helps the audience and the actors to interact with the drama and each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a forum for leisure and relief.</td>
<td>It is a forum for the community to deal with issues affecting them, come up with a workable solution, and improve their way of life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is elaborately done with special effort put towards acting quality, lighting, costuming, directing, and stage management.</td>
<td>It generally uses a lot of improvisation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainly deal with imaginary and fictional issues that may be new or unknown to the audience’s environment and life.</td>
<td>It deals with issues that are specific to the target audience and affect them directly in their daily lives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unlike conventional theatre, community theatre is audience centered and encourages the audience’s active and critical participation. Through this participation the audience is empowered to create and re-create scenarios and solve the drama-dilemmas presented in search of practical solutions which they may apply in their lives. The audience can ask questions, give suggestions, offer solutions, and act in the performance. The actors actively mingle and relate closely with the audience thus bridging the gap between them and enhancing mutual understanding.
MOBILIZATION AND ICE-BREAKING

MOBILIZATION

Mobilization is the process of attracting and gathering the target audience to the community theatre venue for the outreach. The drama group may mobilize on the actual day of the session, announce an outreach during a previous session, or create a reliable routine that is known by the target audience.

Mobilization is important in informing the audience about the outreach and also for promoting it. It is not only a way of bringing the audience together but also psyching them up for the CT session.

The many ways of mobilizing a CT audience ensures that the audience and the target audience too may carry out the activity. A few mobilization techniques are given below.

- Inform the audience of the CT site and the fixed schedule (for example, Mondays from 9:00 am to 11:00 am every two weeks).

- When scheduling the CT session, avoid times and days that would conflict with other chores or activities of the target audience. For example, if CT targets young girls out of school, the times between 9:00 am to 11:00 am and 3:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. would be appropriate because they have finished the domestic chores. Holding CT outreaches on market days, worship days, or during a funeral is also bad for mobilization.

- Use song, dance, and theatre games to attract the audience to the site. Popular songs, dances, and theatre games are very good in mobilizing the audience. They are fun to watch and participate in and they quickly and easily create the perfect mood for the outreach. They are also participatory and offer a good avenue for the target audience to become involved in the mobilization. Many communities and target audiences have popular songs, dances, and theatre games that can be used in mobilization. The theatre troupe should learn these and create a repertoire to use in mobilizing their audiences. Musical instruments and accompaniments can also play a major role in enhancing the mobilization of the audience. Metal gongs, leg and arm jingles, shakers, horns can be used. Songs and dances are one of the cheapest forms of mobilization.

- Use posters or handbills with the session theme and date, place, and time of the performance. The theatre troupe can pass out handbills to the target audience members and post the posters in visible spots around the CT site. Handbills are effective because they can be given only to members of the target audience unlike posters, which can be seen by every member of the community. Handbills and posters could be expensive to sustain and might also litter the environment.
- Use door-to-door mobilization with the theatre troupe going on a door-to-door campaign and asking the target audience to attend the CT session. In a situation where considerable goodwill has been established, this is an effective mobilization tool. Timing and respect for people’s privacy need to be observed.

- Employing word of mouth among the target audience. The facilitator asks the audience to tell their friends about CT and bring them to the next session. Where the magnetism of the outreach has been well considered and implemented, the target audience will be thrilled and eager to share it with their peers and invite them to come to experience the CT session.

- Advertisement or announcement during the previous community theatre session. At the conclusion of the theatre session, the troupe announces and reminds the target audience of the date and time of the next session. This should be done at every CT session.

- Use of electronics (e.g. public address system or bullhorns). The PAS can be mounted at the venue and used to announce the CT session or call the target audience to the CT site. PAS are effective because they can project sound over a wide area and reach many people. They can also play recorded music. However, they are bulky, expensive, and not sustainable.

*ICEBREAKING*

Community theatre is successful when the audience participates fully in the drama and interacts amongst themselves and with the troupe members. It is important to prepare the audience and the actors for the performance; create feelings of trust, rapport, and
friendliness to encourage participation and interaction. This process may be referred to as icebreaking.

Participation in the MT calls for the audience and the actors to adopt a participatory mood. Inhibitions, shyness, and body consciousness need to be broken and the body and mind need to be ready for the MT enactments and participatory activities. Icebreaking activities stimulate the performance mood and prepare the body to become a communication tool.

It should be noted that some mobilization techniques might actually prepare the audience for participation. In such scenarios, the audience comes to the CT site ready and willing to participate in the activity. That said, we must be cautious about assuming that because the target audience has gathered then they are ready to actively participate in the CT activity. Some people may have come to the site but are still in a non-participatory mood. For this reason, icebreaking activities may take place.

Theatre games and exercises are used to make people feel comfortable to discuss the dilemma to be presented, ask questions, share experiences, and perform in front of the audience.

Theatre games and exercises may help achieve concentration, alertness, trust, openness, boldness, and the desire to participate in the CT session. Breaking inhibitions, body consciousness, and shyness is the goal of icebreaking. Icebreaking also aims to create rapport, trust, and interaction between the target audience and the actors and facilitators.

**Icebreaking: Points to remember**

- Explain the icebreaking session and invite the audience to join in it.
- Ensure that involvement in the theatre games and exercises is voluntary. Do not force anyone to participate.
- Choose theatre games and exercises that are respectful and do not embarrass the community. Songs or dance movements should not be vulgar or go against the morals of the community.
- Explain the theatre game simply and clearly so that the audience understands their role in it.
- Begin with theatre games that are easy to understand and perform, then move on to the more complex.
- Ensure that the games are interesting, interactive, and fun. Theatre games and exercises that poke fun at people should be directed at the troupe members and not the audience.

An example of icebreaking theatre games and exercises for troupe members is given below.

1. Let troupe members/actors walk around the CT site and try to step on every square-millimeter of the space. The physical movement warms up the participants as they begin to explore the space.

2. Ask members to establish eye contact with each other. They begin to feel the sensitivity of the self as each peer into each other’s eye. The feeling is camouflaged by giggles and with some boisterous movements. The longer the exercise lasts the freer the participants begin to feel.
3. Ask each actor to shake hands with the other as they pass each other. The sense of ‘self’ reasserts itself. At first the greeting is mechanical and cursory.

4. Ask participants to look into the eyes of the person they are greeting and actually call them by name as they shake hands. The physicality of the action begins to break the personal space consciousness among the participants. Each participant begins to notice the individual from the crowd in the gathering.

5. Ask each actor to note something particular about each partner as they shake hands. Ask them to take note of it and recall it for future sharing with everyone. The feeling of being scrutinized rekindles the feeling of self-consciousness, helplessness, and vulnerability. Each partner wonders, “What have they noted in me that is peculiar.” The feeling of being stripped naked in the eyes of everyone will allow actors to experience the ‘being observed’ syndrome like members of the target audience do.

6. Ask the troupe members to ‘mingle’ around the space. Upon your call of a required number, the participants cluster into groups of that number as fast as possible. Those who do not get into the requisite groups are penalized in some agreed upon manner e.g. kneeling or squatting. As the participants desperately leap into the required groups they completely forget the personal physical space or ‘halo’ around them.

7. To wind up the inhibitions breaking session, arrange participants and troupe members in a circle with their hands held firmly. Ask the members to try to reach an individual in the other corner of the room. In the first attempts the game will be scrappy and individuals will rush to get to a person fast. As they get into it they will deliberately make the tangle more entangled, oblivious of the physical proximity that it enhances, as it gets more entangled. Make sure that the participants remove spectacles and dangerous shoes, bracelets, bangles etc. Minimize swaying since the whole tangle could collapse and cause injury.
SCRIPTING

An effective CT script is created through the collaborative efforts of the target audience and the drama troupe. The troupe should pay attention to the questions the audience members ask, personal experiences they share, and the solutions they offer during enactments and post-performance discussions to come up with future topics. The script should be based on the challenges and dilemmas that community members face.

Things to Consider When Scripting

Careful consideration of the questions below will make the drama appropriate and help the target audience relate to the characters and see themselves in the characters and in the characters’ dilemmas.

1. What is a problem or issue facing the target audience? This will form the theme or topic to be covered by the script or the dilemma that needs to be resolved. It is important for the topic to be directly related to the target audience to keep them interested, and encourage participation and discussion. For example, the problem may be the fast spread of HIV among the target audience.

2. What are the causes and motivators of this problem? Answering this question may contribute towards identifying the target audience’s involvement in the perpetuation of the problem. For example, within the target audience’s environment, what are the causes of the fast spread of HIV? The reasons could be lack of confidence in condoms, peer pressure to have sex, or unprotected sex with many partners.

3. Who are the key players in this conflict? This will determine the characters. It could be sugar daddies, young girls, the village dancer, the shopkeeper, the pastor, the young men’s gang, or maids at homes. The players refer to all the people who contribute to or are affected by the problem.

4. Where does the problem take place? This creates a realistic setting for the drama. Does it occur in churches, discos, video dens, homes, play-fields, or lodgings?

5. What are the words and phrases used to talk about the problem in the community and among the target audience? This will influence the language and specific words used in the script.

6. What are the myths, prejudices, idiosyncrasies, beliefs, and attitudes associated with the issue? This will also help us represent the community position well in the drama and also create quality dilemmas whose solutions may be beneficial to the target audience.

7. What are the programmatic facts relating to the communal issue? This may help in coming up with facilitation questions in anticipation of the discussion or debate that will ensue involving the audience members.

8. What has been done to try to combat the problem? What has been successful? What has been unsuccessful? This will help to create the context for the dilemma.
Community Theatre Scripts…

Community theatre scripts are entertaining and not preachy. They have a small cast (ideally no more than 7 characters) and are generally short (ideally not more than 15 minutes so as not to compete with the audience’s time) and may contain the facilitation questions that the facilitator refers to in provoking audience participation.

Importance of the Script in Community Theatre

The script is important in several ways in community theatre.

• One, it can serve as a good record of issues that the troupe and the audience have dealt with. Where monitoring is intended, the scripts can be used as indicators of actual achievements.

• Secondly, the script acts as a good guide for the performers in their bid to successfully present a dilemma to the audience. It is an aid to enactment and saves the performers the embarrassment of being caught off guard as so often happens in impromptu drama.

• Thirdly, a well-written community theatre script will be a useful reference for the facilitator in the course of guiding audience participation and discussions. The synopsis, key question, cast and character profiles, freeze point and the facilitation points or questions are all included for the benefit of good facilitation.

• Finally, because scripts can be borrowed and exchanged for localization, it ensures that more members of the target audience can be presented with the same kind of dilemma to break.

The Issues Grid

This is a template that may be used to determine the thematic concerns of a particular audience. It is a good tool for focusing the issues of the local population and also to determine the right point of entry of the script. The script should target the ‘Audience Issue’
column as this represents the cause of the risky behavior that is intended to be dealt with. Below is a sample Issues Grid:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Risky Behavior</th>
<th>Consequence(s)</th>
<th>Target Audience Issue</th>
<th>Desired Behavior</th>
<th>Dilemma Choice 1</th>
<th>Dilemma Choice 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Woman avoids knowing her HIV status (and that of their partners). | - You may engage in sex with an HIV+ person and get infected  
- You may infect your unborn child with HIV if you are infected | - If I go for a test and am declared HIV+, I will die;  
- If people see me going for a test, they will think I am HIV+ | Go for a test and know your HIV status so that you can plan on how to deliver your baby free from HIV. | I’ll go for the test, but if I am HIV+ and my partner/family gets to know, I’ll be rejected | I will not go, but if I am indeed HIV+ and I do not know, I will be putting my child at risk of HIV infection. |
| Young man not going for early and competent STI treatment | Impotence  
Increased risk of HIV infection  
Difficulty of treating late-stage STIs | If I go, the nurse will not be confidential.  
I’ll be asked to bring my sex partner(s) along.  
I will be embarrassed. | Treat STIs as soon as possible.  
Inform your sex partners and facilitate their treatment too. | I will go but if I ask my girlfriend to go too, she will ask questions about my behaviors! | I will not go but if I am not treated and my wife asks for sex and I refuse she will know my behaviors! |
| Man refuses to discuss family planning with wife. | | | | | |

**IMPORTANT!**

**Current Risky Behavior Column:** If a community theatre script is based on this column, it risks becoming judgmental and thus repulsive to the audience.

**Consequences Column:** Scripts based on this column generally tend to spread fear and may paralyze the audience into inaction or have only short-term effect on behavior.

**Audience Issue Column:** An ideal community theatre script draws itself from the target audience’s issues. These are the reasons that put the audience in problems and if they deal with them, a practical solution may be found. Community Theatre scripts should be created with column 3 in mind.

**Desired Behavior Column:** Dramas developed based on this column tend to be preachy and boring, repeating program jargon that is not useful to the audience.

**The Dilemma Holder Diagram**

A well-constructed community theatre script should present the audience with a character who is facing a dilemma and who needs to make a choice out of several available. The choice made will have a significant impact on the life of the character. We call this character the ‘Dilemma Holder’. Additionally, a good script should help the audience to identify the motivations to a dilemma-holder’s behavior. These are common life needs, wants, pressures etc. We refer to them as ‘push and pull factors’. Finally, it should be clear to the audience the choices that are available to the dilemma holder. These are the ‘dilemma choices’.
Once a script is done, the dilemma holder diagram may be used as a checklist to find out whether or not the script presents the above items. Below is the dilemma holder diagram (Magnet Theatre, referred to in the diagram, is a form of community theatre):

*Dilemma Holder:* Does your drama clearly show a character who faces a difficult decision whose outcome may affect their health, stature, esteem, relationships, life etc. positively and/or negatively? Your drama must present the audience with a character who showcases the common dilemmas they face with regard to the issue being addressed. Audience participation in Magnet Theatre is focused towards helping the dilemma holder make the best, practical decision that can mitigate the consequences of an option.

*Push or Pull Factors:* Does the entertaining, credible and relevant MT drama utilize the common and familiar real life experiences of the audience to develop the plot and character experiences. How does the drama show these factors contributing to the dilemma holder’s exposure to potentially risky situations? Push-pull factors may be beliefs, attitudes, peer pressure, poverty, traditions, desires, ignorance, environment, lack of skills, etc.? These factors contribute to the difficulty of making a decision at the key dramatic moment.

*What RISK can I manage? How can I ensure that I am safe and not sorry?*

1. + -
2. + -
3. + -

*Dilemma Choices:* Does the drama, at a key dramatic moment provide the audience with a situation that calls for making difficult decisions regarding choosing between two or more options, each of which has both positive and negative outcomes? The MT drama should not push for a particular choice or instruct the audience to make a particular decision, but help them to consider the practicality of a variety of possible solutions. Only one option may be taken!
ACTING (ENACTMENT)

Acting is the performance or enactment of a prepared or impromptu drama during the community theatre outreach/session. In community theatre, both the troupe members and the target audience are involved at certain levels in the performance. The troupe members perform the play that presents a dilemma. Both the troupe members and the target audience participate in the improvisational dramas that test solutions or opinions from the audience.

Conventional theatre acting is concerned with interpreting and bringing to life a script to entertain the audience. Acting for community theatre seeks to provoke the audience to participate in the open-ended drama by voicing opinions or joining in the acting to change or suggest the course of the play. The center of conventional theatre enactment is the script but in non-conventional theatre, the script is dispensable. Spontaneous enactments are a key element in non-conventional theatre.

In CT, the enactment is used to present the dilemma to the audience. The dilemma needs to be presented clearly so the audience understands it fully. This requires good rehearsals to polish the enactment.

The CT enactment is not as elaborate as the conventional theatre performances. It is just good enough to set the dilemma or pose the problem to the audience. Very elaborate and sharp enactment may intimidate the audience and make them feel that they are poor. They might therefore not replace an actor and/or act out their own viewpoint. On the other hand, bad and messy enactment by the actors may rob the session of its seriousness and lose the respect of the target audience.

The costumes and props used should be appropriate. The clothes they wear and the objects they carry must help the audience recognize the characters easily. The troupe should try as much as possible to think through costuming from the point of view of their audience’s life experiences. Because of the expense involved in obtaining costumes and props, the troupe should improvise as much as possible.

Audience involvement in acting

One way a member of the audience can participate in the community theatre session is by coming on stage, replacing a character and acting with the other characters to solve a dilemma. Remember that the target audience members are not professional actors and their main concern is solving the dilemma, not quality acting. The quality of acting in community theatre is simple enough for the audience members to feel comfortable in joining as actors. It is however not poor as to compromise the depiction scenarios or presentation of dilemmas.

The role of the actors when audience members are on stage

Audience members should take the place of the character that is faced with the dilemma and needs to resolve it. The remaining actor(s) continue to represent the problem in the
drama. He or she and advocate for the behavior that is causing the problem. The actor should honestly present that position without exaggeration, while reminding the audience member that the problem is real and not easily solved. The actor has to take a stance that encourages the audience member to deal with the problem and come up with a solution. The actor will not be obstinate and argue for arguments’ sake, and should agree with the audience member if the situation so demands.

The actor’s manner of interacting with the audience member should not be frightening, embarrassing, or intimidating. Frightened, embarrassed, and intimidated audience members will not be feel comfortable sharing their opinions or may react negatively at the expense of the outreach session. This can also discourage other audience members from participating. On the other hand, the actor should not allow himself to be easily manipulated by the audience member and create a false belief that solving the problem or dilemma is easy.

Once an audience member has acted out his/her solution for breaking the dilemma, the facilitator and the troupe should show appreciation for his or her participation by clapping or verbally congratulating him or her. It is essential that community theatre actors are familiar with the program issues, the causes and effects of the problem in the community, and how the target audience has tried to solve the problem. This will allow troupe members to easily improvise in the enactment with the audience members.
Community Theatre Acting Challenges

Community theatre usually takes place outdoors and generally attracts a large audience. This poses a challenge to the actors. Theatre generally depends on the body and the voice. The actor has to be seen and heard by everyone gathered for the CT outreach. Because the sessions mostly take place outdoors and the audience numbers are large, the actor must project his or her voice for the benefit of all without shouting. The audience can only participate effectively if they can hear what is being said. The facilitator can help by working with the audience to establish norms for keeping the peace and silence. Acting in the CT space, where the audience often arranges itself in a circle can be a challenge for the actors because some of the audience members are behind the performers. The facilitator can ask the audience to form a semi-circle.

Improvisational enactment can be challenging. The actor is required to keenly listen to participants’ views and suggestions on a particular issue and translate them into dialogue and action. The interpretation has to be faithful to the audience member’s thoughts and must be countered by the opposing actors honestly and without obstinate resistance or exaggerations.

Finally, performing with ‘strangers’ is a major challenge, especially during the early days of CT in a given community. The actor is required to interact with the audience members when they fill the shoes of one of the characters. These audience members are not everyday performers and need to be encouraged through their enactment as they attempt to present their views and positions regarding the issue being examined. The actors should be sure not to intimidate the audience members, while at the same time not be condescending. Similarly, the actor must be ready for unpredictable behavior and unusual performance styles.
FACILITATION

Facilitation is the act of guiding the CT session and creating and maintaining a conducive environment for the audience and actors to interact in the drama and participate unobtrusively in the search of workable solutions to the problems facing the target audience. A good facilitator (also referred to as a joker) allows the target audience to lead the discussion through their questions, responses, comments, and experience sharing.

The facilitator is the ‘neutral’ person who acts as a bridge between the drama, the actors, and the audience. He or she is responsible for guiding the interaction and participation between the parties and elements in the community theatre session.

Good facilitation demands that the CT facilitator clearly understand the structure of the theatre session, the theme of the day, the drama, and the dilemma that will be considered by the target audience. The facilitator needs to understand his or her role in the theatre session, the qualities of a good facilitator, and possess facilitation techniques that enhance audience participation during the CT session.

The information below summarizes the roles of a facilitator in community theatre, qualities of a good facilitator and facilitation techniques that enhance audience participation during the CT session.

Facilitator’s Roles

• Responsible for the outreach, including its overall management and conduct.
• Acts as a bridge that connects and guides the interaction between the audience, actors, and the drama.
• Introduces the troupe, theme of the day, and the drama to the community. Describes the topic of the outreach for participants to understand how it relates to them.
• Assigns and explains the role of the target audience during the community theatre session using clear directions and instructions. For example, the facilitator may explain the characters’ profiles and invite the audience to give them local names.
• Clearly explains the rules during the session. These rules are made in consultation with the audience and should ideally facilitate the smooth running of the session.
• Facilitates audience involvement by asking questions and relaying doubts to help the audience consider the issue at hand and make their own practical decisions.
• Identifies individuals who have changed behavior and prepares them for magnification to the general target audience, and then conducts the magnification session.
• Facilitates participation and guides interaction by distributing chances to audience members, censoring use of unacceptable language, and protecting participants from vicious and personal attacks or references.
• Enables the target audience to generate and own the knowledge, share experiences, and come up with acceptable and actionable decisions.
• Clearly summarizes the discussion and solutions offered by the target audience during the outreach session.
Qualities of a good facilitator/joker

• A patient and active listener. He or she talks less, listens more, and does not interrupt a speaker. He or she has two ears and one mouth and uses them in the same proportion, and fills the two ears before emptying the mouth!
• A keen observer and alert to happenings in the community theatre session.
• Does not influence or manipulate the audience or the outcome of their participation. He or she elevates the audience’s interpretation of the issue rather than his or her own.
• Honest and admits if he or she does not know the answer to a question.
• Knowledgeable of the subject matter, but does not impose it on the target audience. Instead he or she guides the audience through a process of understanding the issues based on their own experiences, capacities, and environment.
• Respectful of the audience’s opinions and acknowledges that there are no right or wrong answers where opinions are concerned.
• A midwife who helps the audience with the birth of new ideas.
• A team player and does not make decisions alone. He or she is neither authoritarian nor egocentric.
• Willing to ask questions and make sure that everyone has understood the position being articulated.
• Understanding and respectful of the community and the target audience. He or she is sensitive to their concerns and feelings and is flexible, without being easily manipulated.
• A clear speaker and easy to hear.
• Confident, clear-headed, and open-minded and instills confidence in the audience.
• Magnetic, energetic and lively. He or she will attract, stimulate and invigorate the audience by using lighthearted, and appropriate humor. He or she is a joker!

A Facilitator/Joker/Animator in action!
Facilitation Techniques to Encourage Participation

- Eye contact but not staring. Looking away while a participant is contributing is demoralizing. Ideally the participant is addressing the audience through the facilitator and all attention should be accorded him or her.
- Head nodding. This shows the participant that you are listening to him or her and it encourages participation and sharing.
- Smiling. A stone-faced or frowning facilitator hinders audience participation.
- Positive verbal reinforcement. A facilitator does not admonish participants but encourages them by using words that facilitate a desire to participate (e.g. good, thank you, my friend).
- Asking questions. Appropriate questions can guide the audience into a deeper interrogation of an issue. Good questions help participants consider all angles of a suggested resolution
- Respecting the participant. If the facilitator is seen to be disrespectful, resentment will set in and the whole exercise may suffer.
- Creating a safe environment for participation. A facilitator will ensure that there is no heckling, catcalling, name-calling, jeers, insults, or laughter directed at the participant.
- Encouraging posture and body language. Keeping hands in pockets; folding hands across the chest; bored, tired, or disinterested pose; and edgy, indecisive, or confused demeanor all negatively impact participation.
- Calling participants by their names. People love their names and feel good when they correctly refer them. A good facilitator will learn the names of his/her repeat audience and constantly use them in his/her conversations with them.

The Facilitator’s Space

A large number of people attend the CT session and all of them want and need to feel like they are part and parcel of the session. They should feel acknowledged and appreciated and that the facilitator is paying attention to each of them. Each individual audience member at the outreach should feel like the facilitator is talking with him or her. If the facilitator maintains a huge gap between himself and the audience, there will be a feeling of alienation, of ‘them and us’. A facilitator who chooses to remain in the ‘acting space’ throughout fails in creating an opportunity for the audience to feel at ease to share that space too.

If the facilitator comes too close to the audience, they may feel intimidated and or that their personal space has been violated. A facilitator who chooses to remain in the ‘audience’s space’ may alienate the actors and at the same time become too easy with the audience to compromise his/her bridging role. A good facilitator balances his/her movements, to and from (back and forth) the ‘acting’ and ‘audience’ spaces.

The facilitator should maintain a space that is comfortable for communicating with the audience. He or she should be constantly moving, reaching all audience members, and making them feel part and parcel of the session. Constant movement does not mean being jumpy and all over the place.

The facilitator’s movements should not compromise his or her communication with the audience or the actors. At the same time, the position he/she takes should not inhibit actors
and audience participation. For example, once a facilitator has introduced an audience member who replaces one of the actors, he/she should move away to allow for uninterrupted or manipulated impromptu performance. Finally, a facilitator should not block the audience from getting a good view of what is happening on stage.

**Community Theatre Session Structure**

A typical CT session has a set sequence of activities. The structure is flexible. Below are all the activities that can take place during a CT session and their ideal sequence.

- **Audience mobilization.** The entire troupe is involved and the target audience can join in by bringing their peers to the outreach.
- **Icebreaking to break inhibitions and shyness among actors and the audience and marks the beginning of interaction between the audience members and the theatre troupe.**
- **Audience participation in a competition (dance, rap, drama, poetry, or singing) or presentation based on a select theme.** (This session is optional.)
- **Review the previous session and connect the past session to the current one.**
- **Introduction of session's theme, drama, and the actors and their characters.**
- **Enactment with freeze and audience participation is the core activity of the MT session.** This session takes the most time in the outreach. It is the most important session and is indispensable.
- **Magnification of an individual who has adopted a desired behavior, expert interview, or guest speaker session.** (This session is optional.)
- **Post-performance discussion with a few members of the target audience.** This session provides a good opportunity for identifying individuals who are thinking about changing behavior or have already changed behavior.
- **Session review by the facilitator and the troupe.**

**Steps in Facilitating Community Theatre Session**

Immediately after the mobilization and icebreaking activities, the facilitator begins to guide the theatre session. The facilitator should have participated in the mobilization and icebreaking activities and should be mentally and physically prepared to facilitate. He or she should have interacted with the audience and created rapport and goodwill.

**Step 1: Introduction**

1a. **The first time at a new site:**

At the first CT session at a new site with a new audience, introduce yourself, the troupe and briefly describe its work in the community.

Explain the audience’s role during the CT session. Stress that their participation is welcome and crucial to the success of the outreach. The facilitator may briefly differentiate this form of theatre from what the target audience is used to. Explain the various ways the audience can participate in the theatre session: questioning an actor, replacing an actor and acting in his or her place, discussing an issue, giving an opinion, or sharing real life experiences.

Work with the audience to establish the rules for participation (e.g. raising hands when one wants to speak, respect for one another’s opinion, refraining from embarrassing a speaker, avoiding vulgarity, etc). Explain that because the CT session will focus mostly
on opinions, there are no right or wrong answers and people are welcome and encouraged to share their views.

1b. Familiar site:

If CT has been taking place for a while, ask members of the audience to volunteer to participate in a competition or to present anything they may have prepared based on a pre-arranged theme. For out-of-school youth this could be a dance competition or presentation of a rap, song, or poem that the participants have created.

2. If there is a guest speaker or a magnification on this day, inform the audience and let them know at what point in the session the guest will speak or the magnification will take place.

3. Introduce the theme or topic of the day and then ask the Key Question. This is the main query that summarizes the problem being posed to the audience. Allow the audience to engage in a brief discussion or response to the key question.

3. Stop the discussion and, basing yourself on the synopsis, introduce the drama that will present us with the day’s dilemma.

4. Ask each actor, (who by this time are ready in their costumes with their props) to come forward and tell the audience their real names and describe their character profile in the drama. This is sometimes referred to as ‘roling’:

   ‘In this play I am 22 years old, I like having unprotected sex with many partners, I am unemployed, I live with my parents and I have an STI. What name do you want to give me for the play?’

   An actress steps forward during roling to introduce herself and explain her role to the audience during ‘roling’. At the end of the session they will ‘de-role’.

5. Ask the audience to suggest a name for the character who has just described him/herself. If many names are suggested, seek consensus from the audience (though do not spend too much time on this activity). Do this with all the cast members.
6. Once the cast members have been named, present them again to the audience and confirm the names given to them. This is to help both the actors and the audience to remember the character names to be used during that session.

7. Invite the audience to watch and listen as the actors present the day’s enactment.

**Step 2: Freeze and audience participation**

A freeze is a point in the enactment when the facilitator stops the performance. The freeze should happen when the character is facing a dilemma and is about to make a decision. When the enactment is frozen audience members begin to participate.

1. Ask audience members to share their opinions or suggestions about the problem or dilemma presented during the enactment

2. Respectively ask the audience challenging questions to help them explore various viewpoints and challenge their beliefs.

3. For the benefit of everyone, repeat all responses loudly and clearly. It is important to confirm the participant’s position to avoid distortion.

4. Do not force anyone to share his or her opinion.

5. When participants are selected, welcome them and ask their names then give them a chance to express themselves. Always use participants’ name when addressing them.

6. Allow for in-depth discussion and do not interrupt those trying to go into relevant detail. Passionate discussions and debates that polarize the audience are encouraged. Intervene if the discussions tend to turn violent or vulgar.

7. A participant can share his or her views by taking the place of the character facing the dilemma and acting it out. If the participant is unwilling to act, ask the actors to interpret the views in an improvised drama.

8. Ensure that as many people as possible are given opportunities to participate and that the discussion is exhausted to the satisfaction of the audience.

9. When a participant asks a question during session, throw it back to the general audience for consideration. As much as possible, avoid the temptation of turning into a teacher or of lecturing the audience.

10. Allow the enactment to continue with the audience’s comments and suggestions incorporated.

11. After the enactment and participation by the audience is over, call back the performers (who by now have discarded their performance costumes) and let them tell the audience what character they played and what their real names are. For example:

   *I was acting in the play as Mzee Tumbo but my name is....*

This is called de-roling and its purpose is to remind the target audience that we have stepped from the fictional realm and returned to real life.

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Step 3: Guest Speaker or Magnification Session

A community theatre outreach can be followed by a session with a guest speaker to answer questions discussed in a previous outreach or a magnification session where someone who has changed behavior can share his or her personal experiences.

1. Introduce the topic that has necessitated the invitation of a guest speaker or the thematic area of behavior change that the magnification candidate will discuss.

2. Establish the rules of interaction between the audience and the guest speaker or the magnification candidate.

3. Facilitate the session in the manner that was agreed upon with the guest speaker or magnification candidate.

4. Give directions on further consultation or referral to the guest speaker.

5. Thank the guest for his or her time and willingness to share with the target audience.

Step 4: Closing the CT outreach

1. Summarize the key issues discussed and the solutions agreed upon and any follow-up actions suggested. Ask the audience if anything was left out or if they have something more to add.

2. Announce the theme for the next CT outreach and ask participants to prepare something based on this theme during that next outreach.

3. Announce the date and time of the next outreach, confirming the schedule. In case of any scheduling changes, announce them at this time.

4. Give directions to those who have questions or would like to have one-on-one interviews with the facilitators or actors after the performance.

5. Thank the audience for their participation and close the session by inviting a few to the post-performance discussion.

Step 5. Post Performance Discussion

The post-performance discussion (PPD) takes place immediately following the enactment or guest speaker session. The PPD is a discussion with a small number of audience members, facilitated by the facilitator, to discuss issues and questions in more detail in a comfortable and private setting. During the enactment, some members of the audience may have been asked to hold on to some of their comments or questions until the post-performance discussion, the facilitator may have invited audience members to the PPD, and audience members can request to have a PPD with the facilitator.

1. Convene the PPD and guide the discussion, ensuring respect for participants’ deep feelings.

2. Where professional follow-up or services are required, refer the participants to the appropriate office.
3. Use this session to identify those who are pondering changing behavior or have already changed behavior.

**Step 6: Session review by the facilitator and the troupe.**

This marks the end of the CT activity. It is the session where the whole troupe, facilitator and actors, gather to review the outreach. They identify and discuss things that worked and those that did not, and begin to plan for their next outreaches, rehearsals, or scripting sessions. This session needs to be done in a cordial, open, and critical manner with an eye to self-improvement. Good practices need to be noted and applauded. Mistakes need to be reviewed and remedies sought.
AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Audience participation is the active contribution by the audience towards solving the health issues that face them. It is the involvement of the target audience in various ways during the community session with a view to reaching a certain acceptable, practical solution or solutions to community problems. Audience participation refers to the various ways in which the audience contributes to the CT drama or involves themselves in attempts at finding practical solution(s) to a problem presented by a dilemma in the CT drama. It is the audience’s way of reclaiming their role of facilitating their own destiny.

Audience participation is the most important part of community theatre. The audience is wise and has the answers to their problems. The role of the facilitator in community theatre is to provide a good environment for the audience to share this wisdom with each other.

Audience participation may be passive or active. Passive participants will mostly just come to the CT site and observe and listen to what is going on. Active participants will involve themselves in the identification of the problem, suggesting issues to be tackled, generation of solutions by discussing issues, asking questions, acting, giving feedback, sharing experiences etc. Both passive and active participants are important and have their place in the CT session.

Audience participation may begin from the point of mobilization and last throughout the CT outreach session. In this chapter though, we look at audience participation during and after the performance of the dilemma setting drama. The facilitator guides audience participation and the actors encourage audience participation. Participation during the play is especially important to the success of community theatre. It is audience participation that leads to finding solutions to the problems that afflict them. There are several ways an audience member can participate, below are some examples:

Stepping into the shoes of a character: A member of the audience takes over the role of a character in the play and acts out what that character should do when faced with a certain dilemma. The member of the audience is ideally acting out his or her view or opinion of the best way forward. When conducting this form of audience participation and interaction, allow each individual to express him or herself fully, with the audience giving the necessary environment. If another audience member feels that the member did not act well (in terms of decision making, not quality of acting) in his or her opinion, give him or her the chance to take over the shoes. Several people representing different viewpoints and opinions may get the chance to get into the shoes of the character. Note that the audience members getting into the shoes of the character may make limited changes to the character’s profile to one they think will best break the dilemma. Attitudes, behaviors, and feelings may be altered to break the dilemma, but age, sex, and other key characteristics may not. The participants may not change the setting of the dilemma.

Hot-seating or questioning in role: The target audience members get a chance to ask a character to explain some aspects of his actions or behavior in the course of the play. By asking the character about his or her motivation, consequences, legality, morality, and even acceptance of his actions or behaviors, the audience helps the character evaluate himself and take the alternative and desired behavior. This mode of
participation helps the audience to understand the performance better and make informed or appropriate decisions. In this form of participation, the audience uses questions to help the character see or consider the consequences of his or her actions. The character being questioned may be a troupe member or a member of the audience who has come to step into the shoes of a character. Why are you doing that, what do you hope to achieve by that action, would you do the same if it were a member of your family, have you considered this or that alternative, and how long can you maintain that practice, are examples of questions the audience may ask.

**Advising or counseling a character**: Related to questioning in role is counseling or advising the character in a dilemma on what to do. A member of the audience comes forward and engages in a one-on-one conversation with the character in question and offers suggestions on how best to break the dilemma. The character then proceeds to put the advice in practice. While giving the advice, the audience member should be audible enough so that the other members can also hear him or her. It is assumed that the antagonist is not hearing what advice is being given. The audience member gives advice on the strength of being a figurehead who could be socializing with the character in question. The audience member may assume that he or she is the character’s brother, sister, parent, teacher, friend, girlfriend, boyfriend, or workmate.

**Song and dance**: The audience may join in the songs and dances initiated by the actors, or alternatively provide a song or a dance based on the issues raised in the play. In Mombasa, members of the audience created a song that encouraged a character that had been raped not to lose hope but live on courageously. During the ice-breaking session, the audience members may be encouraged to volunteer and lead a theatre game.

**Debate or discussion**: An issue may polarize the community such that there are those that are supporting a certain viewpoint while other are opposed to it. The Key Question starts this division. At the beginning of an outreach the audience is presented with a question derived from the day’s theme. This form of participation gives audience members with different viewpoints an opportunity to air them or interrogate those of their opposers. Discussion and debate have a way of continuing in the community long after the community theatre session has ended. The CT activity seeks to get the community to openly and critically discuss issues that determine their behaviors and practices in life. Through expert opinion, the audience gathers facts that can enrich their discussions and discard myths that might misinform their debates.

**Real-life experience sharing**: Members of the target audience come forward to share experiences that have occurred in their lives and are related to the theme of the theatre session. This form of participation is often applied after the audience has participated in the fictional realm and suggested some solutions. Real life experience sharing ideally tests or supports the solutions suggested by the community. The experiences shared may be personal or of people they know.

**Magnification of behavior change**: A member of the audience who has adopted a solution (reflected in a behavior or practice) that has been discussed and accepted by the community comes forward to share his experience with the audience under the guidance of the facilitator. The magnification candidate shares why he or she adopted that behavior and how beneficial it has been for him or her. This form of participation
helps the rest of the target audience who are still in doubt to clarify their issues and make the decision to change or not.

Through participation and interaction with the actors and the drama, the audience is empowered to create and re-create solutions for the dilemmas presented. It also helps them to rehearse solutions to issues in preparation for real-life dilemmas.

APPRECIATING AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Inform participants that it is always good to appreciate the audience for sharing their views, experiences, knowledge and wisdom. Tell participants that:

Thank You Matters! Appreciating and applauding the audience members who have participated actively during the CT session is necessary and crucial. It is neither automatic nor easy for the audience members to come forward and be the centre of attention, especially in a public gathering. Participation calls for courage and resolve. It reflects a bold decision by the audience to step forward and break a dilemma for their own benefit. This has to be appreciated.

Clapping for the participant or giving verbal commendation are forms of appreciation and applause. A pat in the back, shaking the hands of the participants and constantly referring to the participant by name are also ways of acknowledging participation. At the end of the CT session, the facilitator may also approach the individuals who actively participated and congratulate and thank them for their
contributions and encourage them to participate more in future sessions. ‘Thank you’ should be said to both participating individuals and the general audience.

OBSTACLES TO AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Certain circumstances may injure the audience’s ability or willingness to contribute and interact during the community theatre session. These barriers to effective audience participation include:

- Poor CT site selection thus leading to interference with the concentration of participants.
- Poor timing of CT session i.e. holding the CT outreach when the target audience members need to be busy with other activities and chores.
- Irrelevant theme or imposing issues on the target audience. Ownership of issues that are tackled at or that arise from the CT session leads to spontaneous participation. Alien or strange themes may lead to poor or no participation at all.
- Presence at the CT site of authority figures and strangers who discomfort the target audience. The presence of some people who do not belong to the target audience bracket may cause inhibitions and lead to poor participation.
- Poor or no ice breaking. This means that there is lack of preparation to participate and the absence of a conducive environment for participation. Never assume that the audience is ready and willing to participate in the outreach session simply because they have gathered at the CT site.
- Poor facilitation. The facilitator is the ‘glue’ that binds the participants at the CT session. If it weakens, then the whole session will fall apart.
- Poor or dull or boring drama or enactment. Lack of seriousness when performing or presenting before the audience a poorly rehearsed drama may lead the audience to abstain from participating in the session.
- Elaborate and sharp enactment that makes the audience feel incompetent to come on stage and enact their viewpoints through an impromptu performance.
- Language barrier e.g. use of terms that are not understood universally by the target audience, or using a twang that makes it difficult for the audience to make out what one is saying.
- Rowdy, intimidating, drunk, and bullish members of the target audience. These may make the rest uncomfortable and insecure and thus refrain from participating in the session.
- Routine and monotony. This refers to the repetition of an issue over and over again. Once an issue has been exhausted, there is need to move on. Sticking to one topic or theme makes the CT monotonous and boring to the target audience, and this affects their participation negatively.
IMPROVISATION

Improvisation is the act of creatively, even innovatively, making do with available resources and ideas to cheaply and effectively fulfill a desired dramatic goal. It has an element of spontaneity and immediacy. It responds to dramatic needs within a moment’s notice.

Community Theatre is concerned with two levels of improvisation:

- Improvisation of drama
- Improvisation of props, costumes, and set.

**Improvisation of drama in community theatre**

This is the spontaneous creation and performance of a drama without the opportunity for preparation or rehearsals. The actors and audience members create actions and dialogue while on their feet on stage.

In CT, actors and audience members are often called upon to enact and incorporate participants’ comments into the drama. The actors make up their material spontaneously in the impromptu performance based on audience suggestions, feelings and comments. It is a way of visualizing the ideas and opinions of the audience and also a way of testing the practicality of a given suggestion.

For example, a girl who had not planned to have sex finds herself in a locked room with the boyfriend who demands that they make love. The boyfriend is very insistent and ignores any pleas from the girl to wait. What should the girl do in this scenario? Several members of the audience suggest that:

- She should suggest that they go for VCT first
- She should demand that they use a condom
- She should scream and bite him

These suggestions provide opportunities for the actors to improvise dialogue or actions based on audience’s response towards the girl’s predicament. In the improvisation, the audience member who gave the suggestion may join in and act the part of the girl and improvise the dialogue and actions based on his or her suggestion. While this goes on, the general audience is given an opportunity to clearly evaluate the merits and practicality of the suggestion in solving the dilemma.

**Audience direction of the improvised drama**

The improvisational or impromptu drama during the community theatre session is one way of actively involving the audience. It is normal for members of the audience to disrupt, criticize, or direct the manner in which a certain character is playing the role. Very often the audience member will agree or disagree with the improvisation, which in is a way to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of a suggestion.
Preparing to improvise a drama

Improvisation works best when participants (actors and audience) are listening to the information and keeping their minds open. They are listening rather than preparing what to say! It is important for the actors to really listen to the audience member and take time to really understand what the audience member is saying or suggesting. The facilitator may help by seeking clarification from the audience member if there is confusion.

Listening to the audience member as s/he is contributing something that will manipulate the drama is similar to listening to the director giving instructions in conventional theatre.

Preparing how to react as the audience participant is giving his/her views is a sure way of missing the directions of the audience, which are ideally the most important contributing factor to the impromptu drama.

Be prepared

There are times when actors may be required to play a variety of roles without preparation. It is common, for the audience to suggest that a character who was not in the drama before, help solve a certain dilemma. This means that a new character has to be added to the cast. The CT actors should be able to add new characters quickly through physical representation, gestures, accents, voice changes, or other techniques. The actor may be called upon to play a character of a different age or sex. In the CT scenario the facilitator may request the audience members to profile the new character so as to help the actor with his or her improvisation. Mimicry comes in handy here, but exaggerating and acting clownish or comical should be avoided.

Improvisation of props, costumes, and sets

Because of the limited resources available to most theatre troupes it is often difficult to access some of the props and costumes required for the drama. As such, it is inevitable that cheap, appropriate, and locally accessible materials (and creative manipulation of the body) are used.

Again the impromptu nature of the improvisational dramas at the CT site means that there could be need for props which had not been planned for earlier. An audience member may suggest that the character in a dilemma use a gun or pick up the telephone and call for help to break the dilemma. But the gun or telephone was not prepared earlier. This calls for the improvisation of a gun or a telephone to fulfil the audience member’s directions. The actor can shape the hands and fingers in a way that suggests holding a gun or making a telephone call, or someone might lend the actors his or her phone. The miming in improvisational drama should be familiar to the audience.

There are many improvisational techniques for props that have been used in Zambia. The most common is the creation of a door by having one person holding the other by the
shoulder at arms length. When one is either opening the door or closing it, they move the person’s arm in the appropriate direction and then simulate the creaking of an opening door.

Furniture can be improvised by having some people go down on all fours and the actors sit on their backs.

Cars can be created by using the popular children’s game of tying a rope by the waist of two individuals and having the characters get into the space between the two people. The person in front acts as the driver, with his or her hands miming the steering of the vehicle.

A night setting can be created by having people make the familiar night noises of dogs barking from a distance.

One thing worth noting is respect of created or imagined props. It is foolhardy for the actor to walk through the furniture or wall that had been imaginatively created. Sometimes utensils are mimicked and then they just disappear as the actor forgets about them and embarks on another activity. People used as improvisational tables and chairs get tired or forget their roles and begin moving or doing actions that distract the audience from the dramatic action.

Actors must strive to be disciplined enough to maintain and respect the improvised sets and props.

Costumes have mostly been improvised by using old clothes borrowed or acquired from diverse sources. Alternatively, the clothes that one has may be manipulated in a certain manner to create a desired costume.
A GOOD COMMUNITY THEATRE SITE

The place where community theatre sessions take place in the community is referred to as the community theatre Site. There are many characteristics that determine a suitable CT site. These characteristics and elements determine the steps to follow when looking for an ideal site.

A Good Community Theatre Site is:

- Easy for the target audience to find and explain to their peers.
- Spacious with the capacity to hold up to 150 participants.
- Secure and comfortable. No threats of disruption from drunkards or hooligans and it provides a shade for the audience.
- Friendly to the target audience and not controlled or uncomfortably patronised by other authority figures.
- Inexpensive to maintain and available when needed.
- Not intrusive to other community activities.
- Generally acceptable and agreeable to the target audience.
- Not loud. Located away from mills, factories, markets, roads, and paths.

A Bad Community Theatre Site is:

- Very noisy.
- Busy with other activities.
- Unhygienic.
- Difficult for the target audience to find.
- Unpopular and has a bad reputation (for example, used for drug and alcohol abuse).
- Interferes or competes with other community businesses and activities like spiritual crusades, sports, ceremonies, etc.
- Near distractions like sales, vehicles passing by, etc.
- Expensive to hire and maintain.
COMMUNITY THEATRE
CODE OF CONDUCT

The theatre troupe works in the community and for the benefit of the community. Their job is to empower the target audience to deal with its own issues within their own environment, culture, and life orientations. The troupe is an agent of the community and is bound by the morals and norms of that community.

To enhance rapport and acceptance in the community, the troupe members have to behave in a manner that does not offend the community that has given them the opportunity to interact and engage with their members. Community theatre is either performed by a community to itself, or performed to a community by others. It is performed within the community. For community theatre to be performed for them and by them, it must be relevant to them. It should be based on something that is important to them.

If the community does not approve of a certain kind of dressing, e.g. spaghetti tops and huggies, the person may not be accepted by community members and could shift the focus away from the theme of the outreach. If a troupe members dress in a revealing outfit they draw attention to things other than the content of their message and distract their audience.

The CT troupe members should therefore consider how they talk, dress and even relate with the community. Respect for the community’s space, properties, institutions, leaders, members, festivals and ceremonies, is paramount and unquestionable.

If the CT performers are all over the space engaging in conversation that does not build on their objectives then they are out of line. If one is snuggling with a member of the audience behind a vegetable kiosk and engaging in fondling, they are obviously out of line. If on the other hand they are engaged in an exciting debate and discussions that leads to a near riot between the supporter of condoms and the supporters of abstinence they are fulfilling their mandate.

The drama should not ridicule the community; the language and dressing should not be vulgar; members should not indulge in vices and behaviors considered negative in the community (e.g. coming to the outreach session drunk, drugged, or stoned); and the community’s environment should not be marred or breached by littering.

The troupe members should create their own code of conduct that will determine their interaction with the community during the CT outreaches.

Sample Code of Conduct

- Troupe members will dress decently. Clothes that are revealing or tight or otherwise distract the audience from the theme of the outreach and should be avoided.

- The troupe members will not use vulgar or disrespectful words during the outreach or in the presence of community members.
- Troupe members will respect the community’s property and institutions, and will in no way engage in acts that could cause damage to them.

- Troupe members will conduct themselves responsibly and will not come to the CT site drunk or drugged.

- Troupe members will not engage in quarrels and disagreements among themselves in public, and will respect the agreed upon roles and tasks of each troupe member.

- The troupe will maintain discipline and respect the schedule they have set for the CT activities in the community.

- All troupe members will enthusiastically participate in the CT outreach and avoid actions and behaviors that would make the audience desist from joining the CT session.

- No political or religious propaganda will be propagated at the community theatre session. Actors may not put on political party clothes, symbols etc.

- Troupe members shall not engage in fights with community members or within themselves and will resist all provocations to do so.
MANAGING THE COMMUNITY THEATRE SESSION

The CT session has a number of tasks that need to be dealt with in an efficient and well-coordinated manner. The troupe has the overall responsibility over the CT outreach sessions and is answerable to the administration, community, and affiliated organizations. The facilitator may accept overall responsibility for the session.

In the initial stages, the troupe must fulfill all the administrative requirements like seeking permission from the authorities and the community.

There are several tasks that need to be done during the CT session. These tasks should be identified and assigned to troupe members. In some groups the facilitator, who more often than not is the leader of the troupe, may have the overall responsibility of the CT outreach session. The duties should still be rotated among all the members to improve each individual’s capacity as a community theatre practitioner).

The CT outreach session tasks are:

1. Mobilization of target audience. It is important for every member to actively participate.

2. Icebreaking and leading the theatre games. Icebreaking benefits all the members of the troupe and everyone should participate. One person should be assigned responsibility for leading these activities for each outreach.

3. Facilitation of the outreach session. Facilitation is a very important task during the outreach because the flow and quality depend on the skills of this individual. Every member of the troupe should be encouraged to build up his or her facilitation skills.

4. Enactment of the community play. The core session of the CT outreach is the enactment of the day’s drama. The troupe members who have been cast in the drama carry out this responsibility. All members of the troupe are expected to carry out this task because it is the primary basis of their membership to the troupe.

5. Documenting and recording the community theatre proceedings. For the purposes of monitoring and evaluation, and in preparation for the CT session review (post-mortem discussion), it is important to record information about the outreach. This may be done through still pictures, video, or written notes. Recording the session must be done discreetly and should not interfere with the participation of the audience. When taking pictures or videos, it must be explained to the audience and their consent sought. Responsibility for recording task should be rotated and all members should sharpen their skills in it. It is also important for the troupe to discuss and establish the specific issues that need to be recorded. This could be the date of the outreach, theme of the session, audience size, audience participation, matters arising, and resolutions reached. (Audience size may be determined in
several ways. One person may count all the people present or two people may be used, one counting male participants while the other female participants and when they are through they sum up the figures. One person can count the audience by bunching them in groups of say, 10 or 20 or 30 and then estimate the number of bunches, say 6 or 7 or 8 and then multiply the figures. Here the male/female division is difficult to determine and the resultant figure is generally an estimate.

6. Managing children. Children are very curious and will always be the first to flock to the CT site during the mobilization session. They need to feel appreciated and want attention. If not dealt with carefully, children may become a nuisance to the CT session. However, do not chase them away, because they are also a good mobilization resource. For this reason, it is advisable that the troupe holds a separate and parallel session children. This may be done a few meters from the main session. The troupe needs to prepare for the children during their rehearsals and assign facilitation for this session to one of them. Again, all members of the troupe should be ready to carry out this task.

7. Custody of the community theatre costumes, props, and equipment. In the ideal scenario, everyone should be able to take care of his or her own costumes, props, and other equipment used in the MT outreach. But there are situations where the cast is on stage and cannot attend to these properties. For this reason, one person should be chosen to take care of them. Any member of the troupe can do this.

8. Distribution of IEC materials. The CT outreach may have some accompanying and reinforcing literature and materials meant for the target audience. Due to the huge number of the audience, all members may be involved in the distribution of these materials at some specified period during the CT session. Sometimes this distribution becomes ugly and messy as audience members struggle to get at least a copy. Organizing the format of distribution and asking for the audience’s cooperation is very useful to avoid destruction of the IEC materials.

9. Making referrals for services e.g. STI management. A specific person may be tasked with doing the referrals to professional service and counsel related to the theme of the outreach. The facilitator must introduce this person to the audience members so that audience members know whom to approach.
REFERENCES